

# “Black Horror on the Rhine”: Idealism, Pacifism, and Racism in Feminism and the Left in the Aftermath of the First World War

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*In the aftermath of the First World War, a storm of protest met the stationing of colonial African troops in the occupied German territories. The campaign, spearheaded by legendary Congo reformer Edmund Dene Morel, influenced a broad spectrum of leftists, feminists, anti-imperialists, and pacifists in Great Britain, the United States, and Canada. In the United States and Canada the mainstream labour movement—the American Federation of Labor in the United States and its Canadian affiliate the Trades and Labour Congress—generally did not respond to Morel’s appeal. In contrast, idealistic leftists, feminists, anti-imperialists, and peace activists—men and women most committed to the creation of a world without war, racial prejudice, and gender inequality—took up Morel’s anti-imperialist and blatantly racist campaign. This article seeks to explain how this seeming contradiction came to be.*

*Dans la foulée de la Première Guerre mondiale, une tempête de protestations s’est élevée contre le stationnement de troupes coloniales africaines dans les territoires allemands occupés. La campagne, dirigée par Edmund Dene Morel, légendaire réformateur du Congo, a influencé un large éventail de gauchistes, de féministes, d’anti-impérialistes et de pacifistes en Grande-Bretagne, aux États-Unis et au Canada. Aux États-Unis et au Canada, les courants principaux du mouvement syndical – la fédération américaine du travail et son affilié canadien le Congrès des métiers et du travail – n’ont de façon générale pas répondu à l’appel de Morel. En revanche, les gauchistes, féministes, anti-impérialistes et pacifistes – autant d’hommes et de femmes idéalistes, engagés dans la création d’un monde sans guerre, sans préjugés raciaux et sans inégalités entre sexes – ont adopté la campagne anti-impérialiste et ouvertement raciste de Morel. Le présent article cherche à expliquer cette contradiction apparente.*

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IN THE AFTERMATH of the First World War, Allied troops occupied the Rhineland in western Germany. In the areas occupied by the French, the troops employed were African conscripts from Senegal, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Madagascar, as well as a smaller number of Indochinese. At their peak, African soldiers comprised some 14 per cent of the total French forces.<sup>1</sup> Initially the stationing of these colonial troops produced no reaction, but by November 1919 their presence had become a major issue in the occupied territories themselves, fuelled by exaggerated claims of their numbers. German critics of the occupation equated it with colonization, in which the German people had become colonial subjects.<sup>2</sup> It was the world turned upside down; German women and girls were now at the mercy of highly sexed colonial troops, rapacious black men lacking the restraint of their more “civilized” white counterparts.

The left and the feminist movement were not immune to the campaign; an anti-war, anti-colonialist, and working-class politics did not preclude some of the most virulent forms of anti-black racism. Indeed, as Barbara Bush points out, as the black male presence in Europe increased during and after the First World War, “trans-racial sex between white women and black men of all classes became an obsession among white males.”<sup>3</sup> White males on the left were no exception, but reactions were muted on the North American left by distance and the perception of a more immediate Chinese threat. Middle-class white women who dominated the feminist movement espoused racial equality, but did so with the assurance that black men were subordinate to them—in everything except sexual power.<sup>4</sup> As historians of first-wave feminism have pointed out, there was little place for black women, let alone black men, in their organizations.<sup>5</sup> In the international realm, few western feminists questioned the need for what Leila J. Rupp calls “civilizing external control” of African and Asian peoples.<sup>6</sup>

In stationing colonial African troops in the Rhineland, France was perceived to have abandoned its civilizing mission and placed German girls and women at the mercy of “primitive” black men unable to control their sexual urges. As Jared Poley points out, German writer Alfred von Wrochem, author of an essay entitled *The Colonization of the Rhineland by France*, argued that the French were pursuing immediate nationalist goals, not “the long-range goals of racial uplift thought to be the cornerstone of imperial legitimacy.”<sup>7</sup> A small minority of Marxist and feminist

1 Jared Poley, *Decolonization in Germany: Weimar Narratives of Colonial Loss and Foreign Occupation* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), p. 163.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

3 Barbara Bush, “‘Britain’s Conscience on Africa’: White Women, Race and Imperial Politics in Inter-war Britain” in Clare Midgley, ed., *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 215.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 214.

5 Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women’s Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 73-75; Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 2011), p. 11; Mariana Valverde, “‘When the Mother of the Race is Free’: Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism” in Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds., *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women’s History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 3.

6 Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, p. 75.

7 Poley, *Decolonization in Germany*, p. 221.

anti-imperialists notwithstanding, most western leftists and feminists subscribed to what Immanuel Wallerstein calls European universalism.<sup>8</sup> One of the tasks of European universalism was to “intervene against the barbarians.”<sup>9</sup> Now, in the Rhineland, “barbarian” African conscripts were intervening in civilized Europe, sexually assaulting the women and girls charged by gender with racial uplift. The white colonial masters responsible for racial advancement were now “hurrying the downfall of the race.”<sup>10</sup>

The campaign against the occupation was supported by both men and women on the western left, but western feminists who believed that it was the duty of the “mothers of the race” to rid the world of oppression and war felt a special, gender-based responsibility. Feminists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century tended to have what Sheila Rowbotham calls “a mystical faith in women’s purifying mission,” and at times that desire to purify led to ideas and actions that contravened their own stated belief in the oneness of all peoples and the necessity of ridding the world of racial prejudice.<sup>11</sup> The powerful idealism of feminists and pacifists, which enabled them to create an international movement of aid and support for all women victimized by war, famine, and male brutality, also led to identification with the German women and girls who were allegedly being raped and abused. That identification led to false, exaggerated fears of black male sexuality, which was deemed to represent both a physiological threat to the physical health of the abused white women and a threat to the civilizing mission of white women seeking to create a world without poverty, oppression, and war. Any threat to “racial uplift” was a threat to the creation of that world.

In a 1968 article Robert C. Reinders explores the response to the campaign of the British left, but with little reference to the United States and none to Canada. In addition, his analysis pays little attention to gender, which is crucial in understanding the response of western leftists and feminists to the campaign.<sup>12</sup> Anja Schüler’s claim that “gender played only a very minor role in the protests that were voiced in the United States” cannot be supported on any evidentiary basis.<sup>13</sup> Iris Wigger has moved the debate forward, analysing “the symbiosis of race, class, gender and national stereotypes” in the campaign, with a strong focus on gender.<sup>14</sup> Her emphasis, however, is on written and pictorial depictions of German women and girls in the occupied territories and deals only in passing with the response of the women’s movement, pacifists, and the labour movement to the campaign. Little attention is paid to the United States and none to Canada.<sup>15</sup>

8 Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (New York: The New Press, 2006).

9 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

10 Valverde, “‘When the Mother of the Race is Free,’” p. 13.

11 Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day*, p. 14.

12 Robert C. Reinders, “Racialism on the Left: E. D. Morel and the ‘Black Horror on the Rhine,’” *International Review of Social History*, vol. 13 (1968), pp. 1-28.

13 Anja Schüler, “The ‘Horror on the Rhine’: Rape, Racism and the International Women’s Movement” (John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien, Abteilung für Geschichte, Working Paper No. 86, 1996), p. 1.

14 Iris Wigger, “‘Black Shame’: The Campaign Against ‘Racial Degeneration’ and Female Degradation in Interwar Europe,” *Race & Class*, vol. 51, no. 3 (2010), p. 34.

15 This is also largely true of Sally Marks’s article, “Black Watch on the Rhine: A Study in Propaganda, Prejudice and Prurience,” *European Studies Review*, vol. 13 (1983), pp. 297-333.

Exploring the Canadian and American contexts reveals the complex interplay of the universal idealism of the politics of racial uplift on the one hand, and racism on the other. That relationship in turn explains why the campaign had a greater appeal to feminists, pacifists, and socialist intellectuals than to male trade unionists.

Edmund Dene Morel, the legendary Congo reformer and anti-war activist, was universally identified in Britain, the United States, and Canada as the initiator of the campaign. It is a matter of some contention, however, to claim that the campaign began with him; Iris Wigger, for example, argues that the campaign was initiated by the German government.<sup>16</sup>

Within the Rhineland itself, the beginning of the campaign of vilification of black soldiers for raping white women is even more difficult to pinpoint.<sup>17</sup> The inclusion of black troops in the occupation forces did not hit the German press until a year after the occupation began, and the Reichstag did not discuss the presence of black troops until January 1920.<sup>18</sup> In February and March 1920, Ray Beveridge gave a series of speeches in Hamburg and Munich decrying the presence of black troops, gaining national attention and approbation by exposing the threat of mixed-race children "to the purity of the German race."<sup>19</sup> Beveridge, whose grandfather on her father's side was a former governor of Illinois, was the sister of sculptress Kühne Beveridge. She worked as an actress prior to the First World War, then as of 1915 propagandized for the German cause. She spoke on the *schwarze Schmach* at Berlin University in June 1920, then in the ensuing months spoke in 25 German cities.<sup>20</sup> Her campaign culminated in a mass protest meeting of some 50,000 people at Sagebiel Hall in Hamburg in the spring of 1921.<sup>21</sup>

The campaign may not have originated with either E. D. Morel or Ray Beveridge. Georgia State University historian Jared Poley has detailed the involvement of the *Rheinische Volkspflege* (Protectors of the Rhenish People). Created on August 1, 1919, this nationalist group was "a way of bringing together under one administrative apparatus all of the educational and German-nationalist groups springing up in the occupied territories."<sup>22</sup> Given that the French openly supported the creation of an independent Rhenish state, the *Rheinische Volkspflege* opposed separatist movements in the occupied territories, publicized real and imagined abuses by the occupying French forces, and worked in concert with an alliance of women's groups called the *Rheinische Frauenliga*. Organized early

16 Wigger, "Black Shame," p. 33.

17 Sally Marks claims that "the indigenous troops were not a major issue in the Rhineland itself," asserting that the campaign spread out from Hamburg, Berlin, and Munich ("Black Watch on the Rhine," pp. 300-301).

18 Poley, *Decolonization in Germany*, p. 163.

19 Tina Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), pp. 58-59; Poley, *Decolonization in Germany*, p. 163.

20 Poley, *Decolonization in Germany*, p. 188. Beveridge's speech was published by Ferdinand Hansen, whose Overseas Publishing Company (OPCO) operated out of Hamburg and New York. OPCO also published works by George Sylvester Viereck, who was involved in organizing a mass protest meeting of some 12,000 people against the occupation in Madison Square Garden on February 28, 1921 (pp. 164, 189).

21 Poley, *Decolonization in Germany*, pp. 188-189.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 154.

in 1920, at the same time as E. D. Morel's campaign, the *Frauenliga's* primary concern was the occupation of the Rhineland by black troops.<sup>23</sup>

In its publications the *Rheinische Frauenliga* articulated "fantastical visions of imperialism and cultural decline," as rape became a metaphor for the relationship between the colonizing French and colonized Germans.<sup>24</sup> By focusing on white German women being victimized by black occupying troops, the *Frauenliga's* concerns "were at once feminist and racist."<sup>25</sup> The *Frauenliga's* publication *Farbige Franzosen am Rhein (Coloured Frenchmen on the Rhine)* "suggested that feelings of victimization could be empowering if other women could be spared a similar trauma."<sup>26</sup> This message made its way to Britain, the United States, and Canada, and the major conduit of that message was E. D. Morel. While the exact nature and full extent of the *Frauenlige's* influence on Morel is difficult to pinpoint, we do know that the organization "sent depositions and police reports to Morel."<sup>27</sup> What is not in doubt is that a body of feminists, pacifists, and socialists—male and female—came to put themselves in the place of victimized German womanhood and in the process accepted many, if not most, of the racist beliefs that characterized the campaign in Germany.

The question of who initiated the campaign notwithstanding, there is no doubt that in the English-speaking world the key figure in the spread of the racist campaign against black troops in occupied Germany was Edmund Dene Morel. Prior to the First World War, Morel became a legendary figure by waging a relentless campaign against the brutal regime of King Leopold II of Belgium, whose exploitation of rubber workers in the Belgian Congo led to the deaths of millions of African men, women, and children. Presented as a hero by American journalist and author Adam Hochschild in his widely acclaimed work *King Leopold's Ghost*, Morel led one of the most successful reform campaigns of the early twentieth century. At the urging of Roger Casement, Morel organized the Congo Reform Association in 1904.<sup>28</sup> He quickly enlisted the support of Joseph Conrad, Anatole France, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Mark Twain, among others. In 1912, in response to the Agadir Crisis of 1911, Morel published *Morocco in Diplomacy*, in which he defended Germany and exposed the secret dealings between the British and French governments.

Morel came by his anti-war stance during the First World War honestly, as both his mother and wife were Quakers. With Ramsay MacDonald, he formed the Union of Democratic Control (UDC), which had a membership of 650,000 by 1917, including Bertrand Russell, J. A. Hobson, and Clement Attlee. Morel was secretary of the UDC and director of its magazine *Foreign Affairs*. In the

23 *Ibid.*, p. 157.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

27 Reinders, "Racialism on the Left," p. 14.

28 Roger Casement (1864-1916), born near Dublin, Ireland, was a diplomat and human rights activist who reported on human rights abuses in Africa and South America and an Irish revolutionary who sought German support for an Irish rebellion against British rule during the First World War. He was executed for treason on August 3, 1916, at Pentonville Prison, London. See René MacColl, *Roger Casement: A New Judgment* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956).

same year Morel was sentenced to six months incarceration, which he served in Pentonville Prison. Following his release, Morel joined the Independent Labour Party in April 1918 and became an influential figure in the British Labour Party. In the 1922 British general election Morel was elected to Parliament, defeating Winston Churchill in the process.

Morel, like King Leopold, had a ghost, and the ghost was Morel's obsession with black male sexuality. He was outraged in the aftermath of the First World War when the French stationed African troops in the Rhineland.<sup>29</sup> His obsession has produced a range of responses that at the extremes could not be more different. Adam Hochschild, in *King Leopold's Ghost*, dedicates half a sentence to it, commenting on Morel's belief "that African men had a higher sexual drive than white men and could pose a danger to white women."<sup>30</sup> Hochschild dismisses Morel's racist obsession as one of his "quirks."<sup>31</sup> Hochschild's heroic Morel is counterpoised to the rather different E. D. Morel one finds in the work of African-American historian Clarence Lusane. For Lusane, Hochschild is guilty, "at best," of "selective research and, at worst, a deliberate effort to hide Morel's ugly and undeniable racism."<sup>32</sup> In Lusane's view, Hochschild "fails to acknowledge, let alone criticize, the fact that Morel obsessively led one of the most racist political campaigns to be launched in the first half of the twentieth century."<sup>33</sup>

Clarence Lusane is right, but we can only understand the response of western socialists, feminists, and pacifists to Morel's campaign by qualifying his blanket assertion that in the works of E. D. Morel "Africans are portrayed as less than human."<sup>34</sup> Sir Harry Johnston, in the introduction to Morel's 1906 work *Red Rubber*, wrote: "There are many tribes of Negroes at the present day who are leading lives not much superior in intellectual advancement to those of brutes; *but there is not an existing race of men in Africa that is not emphatically human and capable of improvement.*"<sup>35</sup> Johnston's characterization was echoed by Morel, who described the African as "the man of sorrows in the human family."<sup>36</sup> In his work on the Congo Free State Morel wrote:

Realisation of a great human tragedy is vivid and historically enduring in the measure in which we are able to conjure up a mental vision of its victims, their circumstances and surroundings. This is especially required when the victims belong to a race whose skin is not white. We Europeans do not find it easy to understand that despite differences of colour, climate, and environment, the main channels along which

29 The seemingly contradictory French motives for doing so are analysed in Keith L. Nelson, "'The 'Black Horror on the Rhine': Race as a Factor in Post-World War I Diplomacy," *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 42, no. 4 (December 1970), pp. 606-627.

30 Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Mariner Books, 1999), p. 210.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Clarence Lusane, *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans, and African Americans in the Nazi Era* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 70.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

35 E. D. Morel, *Red Rubber: The Story of the Rubber Slave Trade Flourishing on the Congo in the Year of Grace 1906* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1907), p. xv.

36 E. D. Morel, *The Black Man's Burden* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1969), p. 4.



travel the twin emotions of suffering and joy, are much the same in all races and peoples. Emotions are deeper, more sensitised with civilised man than is the case with uncivilised man: but the difference is only one of degree.<sup>37</sup>

In this passage Morel, rather than affirming that the African identity was based in skin colour, placed the distinction between white and black more on environment than on heredity. The fascination, and the tragedy, of E. D. Morel and the people who agreed with him is that in important ways they were among the more enlightened thinkers of their generation on issues related to racial identity.

Morel's campaign was unleashed on the British public, and the British left in particular, in the spring of 1920. It broke on April 10, 1920, in an issue of the *Daily Herald*, the largest circulation British daily labour paper, edited by George Lansbury.<sup>38</sup> In his article Morel appealed to the worst racial prejudices of his age, claiming that during the First World War "primitive African barbarians ... stuffed their haversacks with eye-balls, ears and heads of the foe." He was convinced that this type of behaviour was continuing in the occupied territories and quoted from an issue of *Clarté*, the Paris journal, commenting on "the barely restrainable bestiality of the black troops" and decrying the "terrible ravages" of syphilis where they were stationed.<sup>39</sup>

For our purposes, the most interesting aspect of Morel's analysis is the appeal he made to women and the working class. Asking his working-class readers to put themselves in the position of the German people, Morel posed the leading question—if the Germans are the victims of today, who will be the victims of tomorrow? Then shifting his focus, Morel asked: "is there no obligation laid upon womanhood as such, in a matter of this kind which goes to the very root of any decent instinct the war may have left alive among the white peoples of the earth?"<sup>40</sup> Morel's use of the expression "womanhood as such" reveals his understanding of the women's movement of his generation and its belief that women were duty-bound as mothers of the race to ensure racial uplift. In the carnage of the First World War, the white race had degenerated, in effect, been returned to the primitive state of nature that characterized black Africans. In the Rhineland, colonial African troops raping white women and girls were directly assaulting white society's only means of salvation, the mothers of the race, and it was up to their sisters around the world to rush to their defence and return to them to their rightful role.

The editorial page of the April 10 *Daily Herald* picked up on both of Morel's points, calling on organized labour to recognize that these troops could be used against the working class and saying that women readers "especially" should pay

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

38 George Lansbury (1859-1940), pacifist and Christian socialist, was born in Halesworth, Suffolk, England. Lansbury became a socialist in the late 1880s and served as a Labour member of parliament in 1910-1912 and 1922-1940. He was editor-proprietor of the *Daily Herald* (1912-1922) and served as leader of the British Labour Party from 1931 to 1935. In North America he is perhaps best known as the grandfather of actress Angela Lansbury.

39 *Daily Herald*, April 10, 1920.

40 *Ibid.*

attention to Morel's arguments.<sup>41</sup> Two days later the editor hammered home the same points, claiming that, unless the black troops were sent back to Africa, "we shall have savages used to blackleg, and to coerce, the workers in all European countries."<sup>42</sup> In a speech in Manchester on April 13, 1920, Lansbury stated: "If ... the workers allowed Governments to employ black troops against Germany to-day the same troops might be used to-morrow against the workers."<sup>43</sup> Even *The Crisis*, edited by legendary African-American leader W. E. B. Du Bois, found the argument compelling and identified with Morel's class analysis.<sup>44</sup> Although *The Crisis* spoke out against the campaign to remove black troops from the Rhineland, it nevertheless carried a long excerpt from an article E. D. Morel had published in the *Freeman*, in which he warned of the dangers to European labour from the black troops.<sup>45</sup>

An editorial in the *Daily Herald* on April 12, 1920, appealed again to women: "Will not the women of Britain, through their organisations, speak out in one great protest?" The Central Committee of the Women's Co-operative Guild responded with a resolution expressing "horror and indignation" at the use of native African troops in Germany, calling on the British government to influence the French government to withdraw the troops immediately and return them to Africa and supporting an "international agreement" opposing the enlistment of "any native African troops by any European power."<sup>46</sup> On April 16, 1920, the *Daily Herald* announced that a mass protest meeting against the use of black troops in Europe was to be held in the Central Hall, Westminster on April 27.<sup>47</sup> The success of the *Herald's* appeal to women was reflected in the fact that the organizing groups included the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Women's Co-operative Guild, the National Federation of Women Workers, the Federation of Women Teachers, the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries, and the Fabian Women's Group.<sup>48</sup>

The resolution adopted at this meeting and an incident that occurred during it reveal in striking and meaningful ways the complex interplay of feminist idealism and racism. The resolution referred to the "importation into Europe for warlike purposes of troops belonging to primitive peoples."<sup>49</sup> The wording echoes the

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Daily Herald*, April 12, 1920.

43 *Manchester Guardian*, April 14, 1920.

44 William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963), historian, editor, sociologist, and civil rights activist, was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. The first African American to earn a Harvard doctorate, Du Bois published his landmark work *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903. He was a founder, in 1909, of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Best known for his advocacy of black rights and Pan-Africanism, he also championed the causes of women, the working class, and colonized peoples. In 1961, two years before his death, he moved to Ghana and joined the Communist Party of the United States.

45 *The Crisis*, vol. 20, no. 3 (July 1920).

46 *Daily Herald*, April 16, 1920.

47 On April 20, 1920, the National Executive of the Labour Party adopted a resolution calling on the Allied governments and the League of Nations to ensure the withdrawal of Black troops from Europe (*Daily Herald*, April 21, 1920).

48 *Manchester Guardian*, April 28, 1920.

49 *Ibid.*



sentiments of an earlier *Daily Herald* editorial denying any “instigation to colour prejudice,” the problem with the troops being their “primitive and savage state of development.”<sup>50</sup> Even more striking was chair Helena Swanwick’s description of the black troops as “precious human beings” who were pawns manipulated by “the capitalist, imperialist, and militarist spirit of the world.”<sup>51</sup> Swanwick’s apparent sensitivity must be contrasted with the fate of a “coloured man” who interrupted Swanwick while she was reading the resolution to ask if she would accept an amendment to it. Swanwick refused, and “some five or six stalwart women stewards marched him out of the hall, amid cheers.”<sup>52</sup> There was no place for “uppity” black people in the politics of racial uplift.

Astonishingly, given how enthusiastically the *Daily Herald* had hyped and advertised this meeting, the paper did not carry an account of its proceedings. Why this was the case remains a mystery, although it is possible that editor George Lansbury wished to disassociate himself from the treatment of the “coloured man” at the meeting. It is also worthy of note that the meeting occurred three days after Jamaican-born poet and writer Claude McKay published “A Black Man Replies” in *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, a pro-Communist paper edited by Sylvia Pankhurst. The *Daily Herald* had refused to publish McKay’s letter, in which he asked: “Why all this obscene, maniacal outburst about the sex vitality of black men in a proletarian paper?”<sup>53</sup> It may be that McKay’s argument got to George Lansbury, because after the April 27 meeting articles dedicated to Morel’s campaign virtually disappeared from the pages of the *Daily Herald*.

George Lansbury may have lost his ardour for the campaign, but E. D. Morel was just getting warmed up. Following a fact-finding trip to Germany in the summer of 1920, he published his pamphlet *The Horror on the Rhine*. The first two editions of 5,000 copies each were sold in less than a month, and there were eight editions by April 1921.<sup>54</sup> Endorsements of the third edition published in August 1920 came from Prince Max von Baden, French Socialist Party leader Jean Longuet, four Socialist Deputies in the Italian Parliament, and General C. B. Thomson, British military representative on the Supreme War Council at Versailles.<sup>55</sup> At home, Morel’s impact on British labour and the left was evidenced

50 *Daily Herald*, April 14, 1920.

51 *Manchester Guardian*, April 28, 1920. Helena (Sickert) Swanwick (1864-1939), British feminist, suffragist, and pacifist, was active in E. D. Morel’s Union of Democratic Control and chair of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (1915-1922). Like Morel a fierce critic of the Treaty of Versailles, Swanwick suffered from depression by the 1930s and committed suicide shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War.

52 *Ibid.*

53 Claude McKay, “A Black Man Replies,” *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, April 24, 1920. Claude McKay (1890-1948) published his first book of poems, *Songs of Jamaica*, in 1912, the same year he moved to the United States. McKay went to Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute and Kansas State University before moving to New York. In 1919 he published his most famous poem, “If We Must Die.” In the same year he went to England, where he wrote *The Workers’ Dreadnought* and became a committed socialist. He returned to the United States in 1921, and his book of poetry, *Harlem Shadows* (1922), helped launch the Harlem Renaissance. McKay drifted away from the left as he got older, and in 1944 he was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church. He died of heart failure in Chicago.

54 Reinders, “Racialism on the Left,” p. 5.

55 E. D. Morel, *The Horror on the Rhine*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: The Union of Democratic Control, August 1920), pp. 23-24.

by the fact that every delegate attending the 1920 Trades Union Congress received a copy.<sup>56</sup>

The appeal of Morel's campaign to feminists and leftists derives from the fact that its core message was intended to be anti-imperialism, not anti-black racism. Morel stated at the outset of *The Horror on the Rhine* that he was indicting French militarism, not the black troops. For Morel, both the women of the Rhineland and the Africans conscripted by French militarism were "its helpless victims."<sup>57</sup> Black African troops, Morel argued, were merely succumbing to the same temptations of power to which European occupying troops had long succumbed.<sup>58</sup> It was natural "that the African troops should take their cue from their masters."<sup>59</sup> To Morel, the strong sexual drive of Africans was not a function of race *per se*, but rather of a harsh environment and the effects of the slave trade necessitating a strong sex drive to ensure racial survival.<sup>60</sup>

Yet Morel's environmental and historical explanations were compromised by his assertion that the African sex impulse was "a more instinctive impulse, and precisely because it is so, a more spontaneous, fiercer, less controllable impulse than among European peoples hedged in by the complicated paraphernalia of convention and laws."<sup>61</sup> Morel attributed the greater sexual restraint of Europeans to laws and institutions—that is, to a superior civilization—not to character or inherent racial superiority. This message was blunted, however, by his creation of the spectre of black soldiers assaulting and raping the womanhood of a defenceless Germany. He wrote: "In ones and twos, sometimes in parties, big, stalwart men from warmer climes, armed with sword-bayonets or knives, sometimes with revolvers, living unnatural lives of restraint, their fierce passions hot within them, roam the countryside."<sup>62</sup> Morel invited his readers to put themselves in the shoes of the German people by asking them to imagine the situation being reversed, with Germany stationing black troops in the West Country, South Wales, or the lowlands of Scotland.<sup>63</sup> He then appealed to a male chivalry many centuries old, invoking "the haunting thought of the insecurity of our women folk."<sup>64</sup>

The timing of Morel's campaign appeared tailor-made to generate a powerful response in the United States. His campaign came on the heels of the "red summer" of 1919, which witnessed at least 25 "race riots" in which hundreds of Americans, the great majority of them African American, were killed. In Elaine, Arkansas, where more than 200 African Americans died in November 1919, "white males reacted with hysterical violence to reassert their masculinity and power."<sup>65</sup> A riot in Omaha, Nebraska, in September 1919 "relied on propaganda promoting

56 Lusane, *Hitler's Black Victims*, p. 75.

57 Morel, *The Horror on the Rhine*, pp. 10-11.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

64 *Ibid.*

65 Jan Voogd, *Race Riots & Resistance: The Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 49.

the black male sexual threat to motivate mass participation.”<sup>66</sup> This was, for all intents and purposes, the *modus operandi* of E. D. Morel’s “Horror on the Rhine” campaign.

Yet an assumption that Morel’s campaign had as dramatic an impact on American labour as on the British Labour Party would be mistaken. A perusal of the *American Federationist*, the monthly magazine of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), reveals that it remained entirely silent on the issue of black troops in Europe and their alleged sexual threat to German women. Samuel Gompers, legendary president of the AFL and editor of the *American Federationist*, did not share E. D. Morel’s position on the causes of the First World War or Morel’s condemnation of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>67</sup> Gompers observed that, at the AFL’s annual convention held in Atlantic City in June 1919, delegates “overwhelmingly agreed” to support ratification of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>68</sup> At the first international meeting of labour representatives after the war, in Amsterdam in the summer of 1919, Gompers supported the position that Germany was responsible for the war.<sup>69</sup> It is also worthy of note that the AFL’s annual convention was held in Montreal, Quebec in 1920, a mere two months after Morel launched the “Horror on the Rhine” campaign in the *Daily Herald*. At this convention Morel’s campaign did not enter into the proceedings.

There is no denying that racism was widespread among white AFL trade unionists, but genuine anti-racism also existed. It surfaced in November 1919 in Bogalusa, Louisiana, a sawmill town in which there was a racially mixed AFL union, whose unusual solidarity was in part inspired by the lynching of a black man, Placide Butler, accused of attempting to rape a white woman.<sup>70</sup> White and black workers faced off against company gunmen, citizens, and business owners, with the result that four white union leaders were shot to death in defence of Sol Dacus, the leading black union activist.<sup>71</sup> The subsequent collapse of the union strengthened the AFL’s long-standing policy of supporting the organizing of separate white and black unions, but this moment of inter-racial solidarity demonstrated that there were AFL trade unionists capable of surmounting the politics of racially-based fear mongering. At both the national and the local levels, therefore, influential factors in the American labour movement militated against support for Morel’s campaign.

Yet, as American sociologist and race theorist Howard Winant points out, the fact that millions of Africans, South Asians, African Americans, and soldiers from

66 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

67 Samuel Gompers (1850-1924) was born into a Jewish family who emigrated from London, England, to New York in 1863. A cigar maker by trade, Gompers became head of the American Federation of Labor when it was organized in 1886 and served as its president for nearly 40 years. At the Versailles Peace Conference following the First World War, Gompers participated in the creation of the International Labor Organization. An advocate of “pure-and-simple” unionism that focused on wages and working conditions, Gompers has long been the *bête-noire* of radical socialists and trade unionists.

68 Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labour: An Autobiography*, vol. 2 (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1967), p. 499.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 504.

70 Voogd, *Race Riots & Resistance*, p. 77.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

the Caribbean had served in the Allied forces in the First World War had produced a “generalized tenor of fear among white racists.”<sup>72</sup> The fear was bolstered by academics; in 1920 Lothrop Stoddard published *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy*, a work seemingly tailor-made to legitimate Morel’s campaign. A Harvard professor, Stoddard was a political scientist, historian, journalist, eugenicist, and pacifist who believed race and heredity to be the guiding forces in history. In his preface, written six weeks before Morel’s campaign broke in *The Daily Herald*, Stoddard observed: “The subjugation of white lands by colored armies may, of course, occur, especially if the white world continues to rend itself with internecine wars.”<sup>73</sup> Stoddard seemed to act as E. D. Morel’s advance agent; having confirmed Morel’s fear of colonial African armies of occupation, Stoddard legitimated the second key element by referring to the “extreme fecundity” of blacks, claiming that “black blood, once entering a human stock, seems never really bred out again.”<sup>74</sup>

Canadian leftists were not immune to this kind of racist fear mongering. In the early 1920s, as Canadian social historian Mariana Valverde points out, Canadians were “exposed to American panics about the sexual influence of black men over white women.”<sup>75</sup> Yet the reality remains that these panics were imported; Canada had an extremely small black population, with no history of plantation slavery or the racial antagonisms it engendered. Canadian socialists and trade unionists who read race theorists such as Lothrop Stoddard were more likely to fear the alleged evils of South Asian, Chinese, and Japanese immigration than to be obsessed by the alleged sexual threat of black males. Indeed, Stoddard himself wrote in his last chapter: “There is no immediate danger of the world being swamped by black blood. But there is a very imminent danger that the white stocks may be swamped by Asiatic blood.”<sup>76</sup> Earlier in his work, Stoddard identified Asian immigration as “incomparably the greatest external problem which faces the white world.”<sup>77</sup> There was no shortage of eager listeners for such a message in Canada, which had just emerged from a viciously racist campaign in British Columbia and elsewhere in the country opposing Asian immigration, in which organized labour played a leading role.<sup>78</sup>

David Goutor, in his work *Guarding the Gates: The Canadian Labour Movement and Immigration, 1872-1934*, details decade after decade of racist and

72 Howard Winant, *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 11; Voogd, *Race Riots & Resistance*, p. 27.

73 Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929), p. vi.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

75 Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), p. 112.

76 Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color*, p. 301.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 251.

78 W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978); Hugh Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979); Norman Buchignani and Doreen Indra, with Ram Srivastava, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985); Patricia Roy, *A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989).

anti-immigrant activism on the part of the mainstream Canadian labour movement that focused on the Chinese. The Chinese, who were in direct competition for jobs with white labourers, especially in British Columbia, were more threatening than blacks, whose numbers were much smaller and whose profile was much lower in the industrial labour market. Goutor argues that “Canadian labour leaders rarely embraced or contributed to racism against blacks, or joined calls for their exclusion from the Dominion.” Instead, trade unionists “presented blacks as engaged in a great struggle for social equality.”<sup>79</sup> This is not to deny that many, if not most, Canadian labour leaders were racists; they most decidedly were. It is to argue, as Goutor suggests, that the struggles of black people were a safe enough distance away not to pose a direct threat to Canadian trade unionists.

A review of English Canadian labour papers in the spring and summer of 1920 reveals a pattern that confirms this interpretation. In eastern Canada, where the influence of the AFL-affiliated Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLCC) leadership remained stronger during the First World War than in western Canada, Morel’s campaign was a non-starter. Silent on the issue was the *Halifax Citizen*, the paper of the Halifax Trades and Labour Council, *The Labor Leader*, the AFL-TLC paper in Toronto, *The Industrial Banner*, an Independent Labor Party paper also published in Toronto, and *The Labor News*, the AFL-TLC paper published in Hamilton. Revealingly, when the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada met in annual convention in September 1920 in Windsor, Ontario, it emulated the AFL convention held in Montreal several months earlier; no resolution having to do with the stationing of black troops in Europe made its way to the convention floor.

On Canada’s west coast the story ran in the *BC Federationist*, the paper of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council. Here the general pattern was upheld in a paper that the following year would serialize Lenin’s work *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. That decision would result in a charge of sedition against editor Albert Wells and the BC Federationist Limited holding company.<sup>80</sup> On April 30, 1920, *The British Columbia Federationist* featured “Black Scourge is Now Ravaging Europe” on its front page. The *Federationist* published word for word the disclaimer in the *Daily Herald* that preceded Morel’s article, to the effect that it was about to present “a revelation so horrible that only the strongest sense that it is our duty to let the public know what is being done would induce us to publish it.” The *Herald* disclaimer, reproduced in *The BC Federationist*, continued: “Still more strictly would we guard against the idea that we are encouraging [*sic*] color prejudice. But for the very reason that we champion the rights of the African native in his own home, we deplore that he should be used as a mere instrument of revenge by an imperialist power.” The disclaimer was followed by a slightly abridged version of Morel’s article, which included

79 David Goutor, *Guarding the Gates: The Canadian Labour Movement and Immigration, 1872-1934* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), p. 43.

80 Ben Isitt, “A Short History of the *BC Federationist*,” [www.bcfederationist.com/a-short-history-of-the-bc-federationist/](http://www.bcfederationist.com/a-short-history-of-the-bc-federationist/).

the worst features of his diatribe against black troops in the occupied German territories:

There they have become a terror and a horror unimaginable to the countryside, raping women and girls—for well known physiological reasons, the raping of a white woman by a negro is nearly always accompanied by serious injury, and not infrequently has fatal results; spreading syphilis, murdering inoffensive civilians, often getting completely out of control; the terrible barbaric incarnation of a barbarous policy, embodied in a so-called peace treaty which puts back the clock 2000 years.

In effect, it was the virulence of Morel's racism that made it to Canada, not the E. D. Morel who described the African as "the man of sorrows in the human family." Seemingly, the stage was set for Canadian labour to emulate the response of the British left, not the reaction of the American Federation of Labor.

The response in Winnipeg, Manitoba, was the exception that proved the rule. The more radical and universalist paper, the Marxist-influenced *One Big Union Bulletin*, remained silent about Morel's campaign.<sup>81</sup> The story did appear, however, in *The Western Labor News*, the paper of the AFL-affiliated Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council, on May 7, 1920. There were two articles, one being a letter from London dated April 17, 1920, by an unidentified writer, who stated: "Knowledge of this unspeakable crime and fiendish vengeance of the French militarists upon a hapless civilian people has been carefully suppressed by the capitalist press. I wonder why? Its wildest inventions about Soviet Russia were far short of this in horror, while these disclosures are indisputably true."<sup>82</sup> On the same page was a second story, taken from the *Daily Herald*, that contained some of the most lurid details about rapes, spreading syphilis, and the reference in the *BC Federationist* piece to the black troops "getting completely out of control."

The *Western Labor News* spoke for the mainstream Trades and Labour Congress, and in that sense we see here an exception to the rule that Morel's campaign had a more powerful effect on the idealistic left than on the mainstream labour movement. It must be remembered, however, that less than a year before the paper had been the organ of the Winnipeg General Strike. That heritage lingered; in quoting the letter of April 17, the *Western Labor News* accepted the claim that, if the capitalist press was suppressing the story of the "black horror," then it must be true. This is the longstanding approach of the pre-war Marxist left in Canada, which constantly hammered away at the idea that the working class was being misled by the bourgeoisie and its press. The *Western Labor News* may have recently become an organ of the mainstream labour movement, but it had clearly not broken away from the influence of its radical past.

81 The silence of the *OBU Bulletin* may be a reflection of the politics of the editor. Unlike the great majority of Anglo-Celtic Canadians of his time, John Houston knew that slavery had existed in Canada and had knowledge of Canada's colonization of Aboriginal Peoples. He also had a long history of good relationships with Jewish and East European socialists in Winnipeg. He was an unlikely candidate, therefore, to be seduced by Morel's campaign.

82 *Western Labor News*, May 7, 1920.



This interpretation is confirmed by a letter the paper chose to publish in its issue of May 21, 1920. The letter was written by Romain Rolland to E. D. Morel at the time of the April 27 meeting in the Central Hall in Westminster.<sup>83</sup> Rolland, a lifelong pacifist, expressed his almost complete agreement with Morel's analysis of European colonialism in Africa. Europeans, Rolland wrote, failed to understand that one day the African peoples they were using and abusing would be turned against them. Rolland opined: "The incredible blindness of the statesmen who, without realizing it, are delivering Europe over to the black and yellow continents, which they armed with their own hands, is itself the unconscious [*sic*] instrument of Destiny."<sup>84</sup> It is anyone's guess what working-class readers of the paper made of Rolland's mysticism, but it nonetheless speaks to the idealism and universalism of the people attracted to Morel's campaign. Not surprisingly, the appeal had already begun to wane by the time Rolland's letter was published.

Even in the western Canadian labour papers the sexual threat posed by the black troops receded into the background within a few weeks. On May 14, 1920, *The Western Labor News* reported on the resolution of the National Executive of the British Labour Party that denounced the use of black troops in the occupied territories because it was a dangerous practice for both the white races and the black troops. In a second article in the same issue, the focus was the "aggressive militarism and vain-glorious imperialism" of France, which led to conscription being imposed on her African colonies with the purpose of creating a "huge slave army for use in Europe." The article did note that in the occupied German territories "outrages are frequent and women are afraid to stir out of doors after dark," but the luridness of the sexual threat had greatly diminished, and the focus clearly shifted from the threat of black male sexuality to the threat of French militarism.<sup>85</sup>

E. D. Morel's campaign had an immediate and forceful impact in Canada, but it faded quickly. In the wake of the publication of Morel's pamphlet *The Horror on the Rhine* there was a last hurrah in October 1920 in the *BC Federationist* in an article entitled "Creates Hell West of the Rhine." In a series of quotations taken directly from *The Horror on the Rhine*, the article charged that black African troops had committed "numberless outrages upon women and girls." The article attested to Morel's credibility, noting his opinions were based on "personal investigation" and affidavits detailing 80 cases of rape.<sup>86</sup> Again, as in the case of the April and May articles, no comment, either favourable or critical, appeared in ensuing issues of the paper.

The fascinating aspect of the publication of these articles is that there was absolutely no response, negative or positive. What this means is difficult to

83 Romain Rolland (1866-1944) was born in Clamecy, Nièvre, France. An essayist, dramatist, and novelist, Rolland was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915. A humanist and pacifist influenced by the philosophical teachings of the ancient scriptures of India, Rolland was a friend and regular correspondent of Gandhi. In 1924 he published *Mahatma Gandhi: The Man Who Became One with the Universal Being*. His correspondents included Albert Schweitzer, Albert Einstein, and Bertrand Russell.

84 *Western Labor News*, May 21, 1920.

85 *Western Labor News*, May 14, 1920.

86 *The British Columbia Federationist*, October 8, 1920.

decipher, although, given the virulence of the articles and the appeal to the most basic of white prejudices, it is remarkable that there were no letters to the editor agreeing with them. It is, of course, possible that the paper received such letters and chose not to print them. Yet it may also suggest a degree of solidarity with blacks, as Goutor suggests. Evidence to this effect emerges in an article entitled "Racial Differences and Labor Disunity," published in *The Western Labor News* on September 10, 1920. In the article author George Palmer referred to racists as "stupid suicidal boobs" sabotaging the unity of the working class. Workers, according to Palmer, needed to get rid of their feelings of racial superiority.

In the United States the story was longer, more complex, and in important ways more revealing. We have already noted the silence of *The American Federationist* on the issue; *The Nation* became the main vehicle for the story when it broke in America. *The Nation* was edited by Oswald Garrison Villard, grandson of legendary abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and son of Frances Garrison Villard, a co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Women's Peace Party, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Emily Greene Balch, secretary-treasurer of the international WILPF, was on the editorial staff of *The Nation* during the First World War.<sup>87</sup> In response to requests to denounce France for garrisoning black troops in Europe, the editor accepted that "German occupied towns are compelled to maintain brothels of white women for these colored troops." However, he added, "these terrible sexual problems and wrongs inevitably arise whether the garrisons be white or black. It is part of the whole abominable system of war." *The Nation* did not believe all the horror stories and argued that the practice was "a gross injustice to the colored troops themselves." They were, echoing Morel's argument in *The Horror on the Rhine*, "the victims of militarism."<sup>88</sup>

The middle-class women's movement in the United States, notably the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, reflected the type of approach to the issue taken by *The Nation*. While *The Nation* and the WILPF avoided the initial excesses that characterized the *Daily Herald*, the *Western Labor News*, and the *BC Federationist*, their attention to the issue was longer-lasting and more complex. In the case of the WILPF, it can be argued that the issue did not come to a head until March 1921, almost a year after Morel's campaign broke in *The Daily Herald*. It is worth an in-depth look at the WILPF, its policies, the role of its legendary honorary chairperson Jane Addams, and the racial politics of the League itself.

It did not take long for feminists and pacifists on both sides of the Atlantic to seek out the support of Jane Addams and the WILPF. On May 3, 1920, Hulda Heckscher of the The Hague wrote to Addams, telling her that E. D. Morel had sent to her husband a leaflet entitled *The Black Scourge in Europe*, which the writer enclosed. Stating her belief that Addams would approve of Morel's actions, Heckscher asked if Addams would find it possible, "as an American woman, to

87 Joyce Blackwell, *No Peace Without Freedom: Race and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1975* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), p. 40.

88 *The Nation*, May 8, 1920.

protest against this outrage on German womanhood.”<sup>89</sup> May Gund of the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association wrote on June 24, 1920, having been alerted to the dangers of black troops by an article on the subject that appeared on June 10 in an issue of the WILPF’s paper *Unity*. Gund, despairing that this was one of “the many injustices that this country is helpless to remedy,” nevertheless told Addams that “if there is any one who can find a way to protest so that it will avail something, it is you.”<sup>90</sup> In September 1920, an anonymous writer wrote concerning “the innocent women and girls of Wiesbaden, now under the thumb of French governed African savages,” appealing to Addams’s “intrepid stand against vice.”<sup>91</sup>

It cannot have been easy for Jane Addams and other members of the WILPF to resist these kinds of appeals to international sisterhood and anti-militarism. It was difficult not to get on board when appeals were being made to the top levels of the American government. Lena Mathes, president of the Woman’s Department of the Chicago Church Federation, wrote to Addams on November 16, 1920, enclosing a set of resolutions on the issue and the response to them of the American Secretary of State. The resolutions reveal the dynamic of the appeal to Addams and her colleagues, noting that the Chicago Church Federation “protested against the outrages perpetrated on Belgian women by the German troops” and was now protesting “in like spirit” against the “numerous outrages” being committed by African blacks on German women.<sup>92</sup> In a sense the appeal made to Addams sought to go beyond race, arguing that all women in similar circumstances deserved the same consideration.

At the same time as Jane Addams and the WILPF were being pressured to support Morel’s campaign, they were being influenced by contrary evidence and argument. The WILPF had a copy of the letter written by G. Howland Shaw on behalf of the Secretary of State in response to the resolutions of the Chicago Church Federation declaring that the “alleged outrages ... have been greatly exaggerated, are in many instances totally false, and ... are being circulated as anti-French propaganda.”<sup>93</sup> The WILPF was also in possession of a letter written by A. Barthelemy, the French Consul, to Dr. Bell of the Chicago Church Federation, in which he declared that the accusations against French African troops “n’ont aucun caractère de précision [*sic*].”<sup>94</sup> Addams and her feminist pacifist colleagues were being torn between “rational” and “emotional” responses to the allegations, between pro-French and pro-German positions.

Having been assured by both the American State Department and the French consul that the atrocity stories were unfounded, in December 1920 Addams was

89 Swarthmore College Peace Collection [hereafter SCPC], Jane Addams Collection [JAC], Series 1, Correspondence, Hulda Heckscher to Jane Addams, May 3, 1920.

90 SCPC, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom [hereafter WILPF], Correspondence, May Gund to Jane Addams, June 24, 1920.

91 SCPC, JAC, Series 1, Correspondence, Anonymous to Jane Addams, September 29, 1920.

92 SCPC, JAC, Series 1, Correspondence, Chicago Church Federation to Bainbridge Colby, Secretary of State, November 8, 1920.

93 SCPC, JAC, Series 1, Correspondence, G. Howland Shaw for the Secretary of State to Dr. Herbert L. Willett, President, Chicago Church Federation, November 13, 1920.

94 SCPC, JAC, Series 1, Correspondence, A. Barthelemy to Dr. Bell, November 30, 1920.

confronted with a further appeal from Sweden. Four Swedish medical professors wrote on December 24, 1920, in some ways going beyond even E. D. Morel's litany of abuses set out in *The Horror on the Rhine*. The authors charged that "young schoolgirls to elderly women" were being threatened with swords and pistols, hit, and choked. The authors added: "Numbers of women have been infected with venereal diseases. Even little boys—of 11, 7 and even 3 years of age—have been subjected to nefarious usage, some of them contracting venereal contagion."<sup>95</sup> Sweden was one of the countries in which the campaign was prominent, in part, as the letter commented, because on May 10, 1920, then Prime Minister Hjalmar Brantling had publicly attested to the truth of the reports.

By late 1920 and early 1921, it is possible to see the momentum building to the document drawn up by the WILPF in March 1921 that was a key element of the North American response to E. D. Morel's campaign. On January 14, 1921, Emma Boos-Jegher had written to Jane Addams from Zurich, Switzerland, arguing that the stationing of black troops in Germany affected the peace movement "in a most intense way." Boos-Jegher stated that it "will be a cause of hatred, more than any other one" and "must infailingly [*sic*] form the germ of a new war." In an impassioned plea to Addams, Boos-Jegher said that only America had the possibility of hearing the voices of European women and responding to their "very intense prayer."<sup>96</sup>

Then, on February 14, 1921, a representative of the "New York Campaign Committee against the Horror on the Rhine" wrote to Addams, appealing to her as "the best known representative of American womanhood."<sup>97</sup> Edmund von Mach invited Addams to speak at a mass meeting to be held in Madison Square Garden on February 28, "to protest against the continued presence of uncivilized colored troops in the occupied district of Germany." The writer enclosed "a copy of the pamphlet written by E. D. Morel," perhaps motivated by his organization's belief that Addams had "given much study to this subject."<sup>98</sup> Addams declined the invitation and the letter was filed, suggesting that she sought to keep her distance from Mach's organization and the meeting. On February 28 the speeches were dominated by male clergymen, military officers, and a justice of the New York Supreme Court; one of the speakers, however, was suffragist and peace activist Sara Bard Field, a supporter of the WILPF.<sup>99</sup> She was therefore involved in the call for Congress to pass the resolution of Republican Congressman Frederick A.

95 SCPC, JAC, Series 1, Correspondence, John Berg, M.D., J. B. Johansson, M.D., John Sjoquist, M.D., and C. G. Santesson, M.D. to Professor A. J. Carlson, M.D., December 24, 1920.

96 SCPC, JAC, Series 1, Correspondence, Emma Boos-Jegher to Jane Addams, January 14, 1921.

97 Robert Reinders points out that the protest was led by German and Irish Americans and the meeting itself featured German and Irish speakers. It is worth noting, however, that the names of the chair, three vice-chairs, secretary, and treasurer of the "New York Campaign Committee against the Horror on the Rhine" are all identifiably German. See SCPC, JAC, Series 1, Correspondence, Edmund von Mach to Jane Addams, February 14, 1921; Reinders, "Racialism on the Left," p. 15; *The Literary Digest*, March 12, 1921.

98 SCPC, JAC, Series 1, Correspondence, Edmund von Mach to Jane Addams, February 14, 1921.

99 SCPC, JAC, Series 14, Reference Material on Jane Addams, New York Campaign Committee against the Horror on the Rhine, "Mass Meeting – Madison Square Garden," March 1921.

Britten, which described the African troops as “semi-civilized, useless, and oft-times brutal defamers of womanhood.”<sup>100</sup>

Seemingly motivated by the meeting on February 28, five days later Harriet Connor Brown, who was in the Washington, DC, local of the WILPF, wrote to Jane Addams. Referring to the black troops, Brown wrote that this was “our problem, if anything ever was, since women are so intimately concerned in it.” Brown enclosed a copy of a letter she had already sent to Mabel Hyde Kittredge, secretary of the American section of the WILPF, addressed to Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes. Brown was in the process of convincing Mary Church Terrell, the only African American woman on the WILPF’s executive committee, to support the campaign for the removal of the black troops.<sup>101</sup> Brown’s reasoning is worth quoting at some length, because it provides telling insight into the mindset of the strict pacifists of her generation:

If an intelligent, broad-minded woman like Mrs. Terrell, will not let herself consider the matter dispassionately, when the welfare of white women is at stake, the outlook is indeed bad for the world. How can colored women then expect us to have sympathy with them, when *their* welfare is jeopardized by white men? We white women of the W. I. L. have certainly wanted to be friends to all women, black and yellow and brown and red, as well as white. Oh, I *don’t* believe a fine woman like Mrs. Terrell will fall short of our high ideals, if you and others whom she respects in the W. I. L. explain them to her.<sup>102</sup>

It is a task of some magnitude to come to grips with Harriet Connor Brown’s idealism and that of her generation of feminist pacifists. It is astonishing to read her suggestion that African-American women in general, and Mary Church Terrell in particular, had the power to subvert the international sisterhood of women. Black women like Mary Church Terrell, in the opinion of Harriet Connor Brown, clearly did not grasp the “high ideals” of the movement of which she was a member. E. D. Morel’s campaign was alluring to so many pacifists and feminists of his generation because it was based in an all-encompassing idealism that the great majority of trade unionists did not share and that only a small minority of male socialist intellectuals could fully comprehend.

The letter to Secretary of State Hughes that Harriet Brown enclosed in her letter to Jane Addams ended with the positions of Addams and Mabel Hyde Kittredge typed in, but is not signed by them.<sup>103</sup> Responding to newspaper reports that the

100 SCPC, JAC, Series 14, Reference Material on Jane Addams, New York Campaign Committee against the Horror on the Rhine, “Statement by Congressman Fred. A. Britten,” March 18, 1921.

101 Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954) was one of the first African American women to earn a college degree. In 1896 she became the first president of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs. Church Terrell was a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and a suffrage activist. Later in life she campaigned against segregation.

102 SCPC, WILPF, Collection DG043, U.S. Section, Series C, General Correspondence 1921-24, Harriet Connor Brown to Jane Addams, March 5, 1921.

103 Blackwell (*No Peace Without Freedom*, p. 95) observes that the origin of the petition that Mary Church Terrell refused to sign “was questionable.” We now know that it originated with Harriet Connor Brown, but I have not found a “petition” in the Addams papers distinct from Brown’s letter. Therefore, the role of Addams and Kittredge in disseminating the petition remains unclear.

Allies were about to invade Germany, Brown wrote to Hughes to point out that this action was unnecessary, because it derived from a failure to understand why the Germans were hesitant to accept the military clauses in the Treaty of Versailles. The German nation, Brown claimed, "would gladly go to work to pay its debts and discharge its obligations were it not for one paralyzing circumstance."<sup>104</sup> That circumstance was the occupation of Germany by coloured troops.

Brown's letter reviewed many of the charges made against black troops in the year since the publication of Morel's article in *The Daily Herald* in April 1920—rape, attempted rape, "immoral crimes against boys," and municipal officials in the occupied territories being forced to provide brothels for the black troops. Brown insisted that the American government launch a protest with the French and British and demand the immediate withdrawal of coloured troops from occupied Germany. The writer added: "We ask this in the full confidence that, in so doing, we shall have not only the hearty support of the splended [*sic*] French and English women who belong to our Women's International League but of the many fine colored women of our own nation who desire 'peace and freedom' for all people of the world."<sup>105</sup>

Harriet Connor Brown's leading role exemplifies the powerful linkage between strict pacifism, idealism, and support for Morel's campaign. In the words of Anne Marie Pois, Connor Brown "promoted militant pacifism" and represented the WILPF at hearings of the United States Congress to oppose military appropriations.<sup>106</sup> In 1921, the same year she was advocating Morel's campaign, Connor Brown spearheaded "an ambitious program that linked a war-strike pledge to a political program of disarmament and anti-militarism."<sup>107</sup> The argument that the black troops in the occupied German territories were at fault for the resistance of the German people to the Treaty of Versailles, and would be to blame if another world war broke out, emerged naturally from absolute opposition to any and all manifestations of imperialism and war.

In fairness to Brown, she did accept Terrell's decision not to sign the petition calling for the removal of black troops, a petition that all 25 white members of the WILPF's executive committee were apparently willing to sign.<sup>108</sup> Brown told Terrell that she was going to launch a protest calling for the withdrawal of all French troops, to be replaced by "neutral troops."<sup>109</sup> Terrell wrote to Addams on March 18, 1921, telling her that the petition made "a direct appeal to race prejudice" and for that reason she could not sign it.<sup>110</sup> In her response Addams,

104 SCPC, JAC, Series 1, Correspondence, Jane Addams and Mabel Hyde Kittredge to Charles Evans Hughes, March 5, 1921.

105 *Ibid.*

106 Anne Marie Pois, "'Practical' and Absolute Pacifism in the Early Years of the U.S. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom" in Thomas P. Socknat and Peter Brock, eds., *Challenge to Mars: Essays on Pacifism from 1918 to 1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 208.

107 *Ibid.*, p. 209.

108 Terrell observes in her book *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Washington, DC: Ransdell, 1940) that she was not willing to make signing the petition unanimous (p. 360). Whether or not she had seen the petition actually signed by all 25 white members of the committee is not known.

109 SCPC, JAC, Series 1, Correspondence, Harriet Connor Brown to Jane Addams, March 15, 1921.

110 SCPC, JAC, Series 1, Correspondence, Mary Church Terrell to Jane Addams, March 18, 1921.



who had chaired a committee on the issue in the Chicago branch of the WILPF, agreed with Terrell that the WILPF should “protest against the occupation of enemy territory not against any special troops.”<sup>111</sup> While this response suggests that Addams was not in favour of Harriet Brown’s position that had made its way into the petition, caution is required. Addams did not turn down Terrell’s offer to resign, and her invitation to Terrell to attend the annual meeting of the WILPF on April 11 was compromised by her observation that the issue of black troops in the occupied territories “will probably come up.”<sup>112</sup>

Yet, following the flurry of activity in March 1921, the issue of black troops faded from the files of the WILPF. In the summer of 1921, as Robert Reinders points out, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom continued to oppose the occupation and reparations, but dropped the focus on the African troops.<sup>113</sup> Gradually, “instinctive” and emotional responses were being overtaken by more reasoned positions based on the testimony of credible sources.

Ironically, it was Rose Henderson, a Canadian socialist feminist, pacifist, and WILPF supporter, who carried the campaign into the middle of the decade. Henderson, more so than male leftists and trade unionists, emulated the women on the British left who rushed to support E. D. Morel’s campaign and American WILPF members such as Harriet Connor Brown. Like so many other leftist radicals, Henderson’s words were very much those of an advocate of racial tolerance and unity. This element of her thinking emerges from the campaigning she did during the British General Election of 1922, when she worked for Sapurji Saklatvala in the riding of North Battersea in London. A Parsee educated at a Catholic College, Saklatvala was the first Labour Party MP of South Asian descent to be elected to the British House of Commons. By 1922 Saklatvala was a Communist Party member and unabashed supporter of the Russian Bolsheviks, but ran in the election with the official endorsement of the Labour Party. In an article published in the *One Big Union Bulletin*, Rose Henderson wrote of her support for Saklatvala:

Racial prejudices and religious bigotries have been and still are two of the hardest to break down. Fed and fostered as they are by a class who themselves know no class or race distinctions in their economic and political relationships, these prejudices have proven to be most powerful weapons in their hands for conquering and destroying the labor movement, and the election of an Indian labor M.P. to the Mother of Parliaments is pregnant with hope for the future possible unity of mankind.<sup>114</sup>

Here we see the kind of critique of racism that was not uncommon on the Canadian left in this period, a seemingly genuine commitment to racial unity.

That said, Rose Henderson’s more enlightened views on race ran up against her undying admiration for E. D. Morel. Henderson, who met Morel in England in the

111 SCPC, JAC, Series 1, Correspondence, Jane Addams to Mary Church Terrell, March 29, 1921.

112 *Ibid.*

113 Reinders, “Racialism on the Left,” p. 19.

114 Rose Henderson, “Native of India Elected to the Mother of Parliaments,” *One Big Union Bulletin*, January 4, 1923.

early 1920s, wrote a eulogy for him that is so effusive in its praise that it makes Adam Hochschild's celebration of Morel appear rather tame. In the aftermath of Morel's death in November 1924, Henderson wrote:

He heard the cry of his dark-skinned brothers for liberty, for justice, alike with his white-skinned brother; to him the struggle was equally noble, equally important. The tears of the dark-skinned woman and child did not fall in vain. He felt alike with her the anguish born of commercial barbarism and sought to dethrone it.... The tears of suffering humanity were as drops of lead, so heavily did they lie on his heart and conscience, and it was because he so loved humanity, was so sure of their innate nobility, and the oneness of all people, that he ever championed the cause of all nations, a cause for which he finally gave life itself. Greater love, greater nobility, greater service, could no man give.<sup>115</sup>

Here, in the words of Irish Canadian Rose Henderson, is the E. D. Morel who considered black Africans fully part of the human family.

Yet within months Rose Henderson was presenting a dramatically different picture of her racial attitudes, one that paralleled to a remarkable degree those of E. D. Morel in his campaign against black troops in Europe. On February 6, 1925, *The British Columbia Federationist* began to serialize Rose Henderson's "Woman and the Game of War," which was published as a pamphlet at the same time under the title "Woman and War." The pamphlet, which sold in excess of 10,000 copies, argued that capitalism was the root cause of war and that it was the mission of the working class to put an end to the root causes. It included a short section of three paragraphs, not really related to those before and after, entitled "How France Prepares for War." Here Rose Henderson made an argument about black troops in Europe that rivalled Morel's in its racism. While not directly engaging the issue of black male sexuality, Henderson argued that "the power of France rests upon a black basis." This was, Henderson claimed, "one of the most menacing and sinister facts of history." She then engaged in the wildest of racist speculations, asking if black troops were to be trained "to subdue and enslave the white peoples?"<sup>116</sup> Taking Morel's speculation about black troops being stationed in Great Britain as a direct example, Henderson asked how Canadian mothers would feel "to see the negroes of the south sent into the industrial centers to protect the interests of the United States."<sup>117</sup>

Even though Rose Henderson did not explicitly raise the alleged sexual threat of the black troops, her vision of Canadian mothers being menaced by the stationing of African-American soldiers in Canadian urban centres echoed Morel's fears. North American feminists and pacifists like Rose Henderson and

115 *The British Columbia Federationist*, December 26, 1924.

116 It is worthy of note that in January 1925 "an Allied refusal to evacuate the northern zone of the occupied territory (as specified in the treaty) led to German protests in Paris, London, and Washington regarding the recent rape of a Rhinish woman by three Moroccan soldiers" (Nelson, "Black Horror on the Rhine," p. 624). While in no way does this excuse Henderson's racist alarmism, the timing suggests that she may have known about this alleged incident and been influenced by it.

117 *The British Columbia Federationist*, April 10, 1925; Rose Henderson, *Woman and War* (Vancouver: Federated Labor Party Publications, 1925).

Harriet Connor Brown responded to E. D. Morel's campaign as "mothers of the race." It is shocking perhaps, but not surprising, that colonial African troops in the Rhineland became entwined in their opposition to imperialism, war, and what they perceived as the degradation of a white womanhood that was the salvation of a world gone wrong.

In the wake of the First World War, it was not difficult for E. D. Morel to convince many leftists, feminists, and pacifists that the downtrodden German people were being ruthlessly and unfairly exploited by an imperialist France that had turned the "civilized" white world upside down by stationing "uncivilized" black African troops in the land of Goethe. All leftists acknowledged that the black troops were victims of French militarism, but it was a short step to accepting the worst kinds of anti-black racism just waiting to be evoked in the emotional hearts of socialists, feminists, and pacifists whose rational minds were committed to the equality of all peoples. E. D. Morel, Helena Swanwick, Romain Rolland, Harriet Connor Brown, Rose Henderson, and thousands of their fellow socialists, feminists, and pacifists were idealists and internationalists who dreamed big dreams. The dreams of middle-class white women who identified with an international sisterhood were the ones that seemed most threatened, however; their advocacy of the central role of white motherhood to the continued health and well-being of the race was at stake in a way that the central concerns of male trade unionists were not. The "white man's burden" in the colonies had become the "white woman's burden" at home.



## Section III:

### A Reflection

